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UNCLAS WARSAW 01570

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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 WARSAW 001570

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KJUS](#) [KCRM](#) [PGOV](#) [PL](#)
SUBJECT: OPERATION PROMISED LAND - ITALIANS AND POLES TAKE
DOWN SLAVE LABOR CAMP

REF: WARSAW 1409

1. Summary: On July 18, Polish and Italian police made simultaneous arrests of 25 individuals allegedly involved in the trafficking and forced labor of an estimated 1000 Polish citizens in the Apulia region of southern Italy. PolOff and LegAtt met with the Polish police officers involved in the international investigation and arrests, called operation "Ziemia Obiecana" or "Promised Land," on July 26 to both congratulate them on their success and deepen U.S.-Polish cooperation on similarly large and complicated trafficking cases. End Summary.

2. On July 19, the story broke in the Polish press of the arrest of 25 individuals involved in the trafficking of workers from Poland to southern Italy. The press speculated that approximately one thousand Poles were victimized in the estimated two to three year scheme, although only 113 were freed from the camp in Nova Orta on July 18. On July 26, PolOff and LegAtt met with Andrzej Trela, Director of the Polish National Police's (PNP) Criminal Bureau, and Pawel Maslowski, the newly-appointed head of the Anti-Trafficking Task Force, who described the intricacies of the case.

Tip From Polish Consulate in Rome

3. According to Trela, the PNP received information from the Polish Consulate in Rome in early 2006 that they had reports of Polish citizens who "escaped" from slave labor camps in Southern Italy and made their way to safety by hiding on trains. In order to investigate these claims, Trela invited representatives of the Italian anti-mafia Carabinieri to Warsaw in March 2006. In the course of their information sharing, they discovered that the Italians had been investigating the same group since 2004, and they decided to

start working together and sharing all information, both through EUROPOL and directly.

Cooperation Specifics

¶4. Maslowski told us that his preference had been to set up a joint team, but unfortunately Italian laws did not permit such an arrangement. Instead, they set up "mirror investigations" in Poland and Italy. The Italians sent two officers to Warsaw, and the Poles sent four officers to Rome to assist with surveillance. The accreditation for visiting officers was provided by EUROPOL, and the officers wore their national uniforms, but did not carry weapons. The most challenging aspect of the cooperation, according to Maslowski, was the European arrest warrant, which Polish prosecutors require in original form to authorize the arrest of subjects in Poland. Before the raid on the camp in Nova Orta, Poles and Italians coordinated their simultaneous arrests via EUROPOL in the Hague. In addition to the subjects detained in Italy, the Polish Border Guards detained several of the group's transporters en route from Italy to Poland before they were tipped off. The Poles and Italians conducted the raid on July 18 because their surveillance indicated a group of thirty Polish citizens would be transported from Lubelskie province (in Eastern Poland) to Italy that week.

Victim Recruitment

¶5. According to Maslowski, Polish workers were lured from Poland to Italy by newspaper advertisements with promises of 5-9 euro per hour for agricultural work in Italy, but when they arrived at the camp in Orta Nova were made to work by armed guards for 1.75 to 3 euro per hour. Victims were told they were in debt because of their costly transfer, and were charged for their room and board at the camp. Victims were unable to work off their debt and were thus caught in an indentured servitude situation. The camp guards were adept at applying cruel punishment and intimidation tactics to squash any opposition to the clearly unfair situation.

WWII Labor Camps Model

¶6. Through surveillance of communications from the camp and their interviews with victims after the raid on the camp, the PNP discovered that, in a twisted throwback to a darker period of Polish history, the camp guards called themselves "kapos" and referred to the transporters as "Eichman." It was also apparent that local Italian police in Apulia knew about the labor camps, as several victims said escapees who alerted local police upon their escape were returned to the camp and severely beaten. The victims were housed in pig pens and had no access to bathrooms or water. Camp guards employed brutal public punishments and killings. Victims told the PNP that guards left one exhausted woman tied up and left all day to die in the sun, beat another man to death with pipes, and hung others from barn beams.

Takedown and Next Steps

¶7. Coordination was so smooth on July 18 that the Italian and Polish police were able to raid the camp without a sound or shot fired. The victims helped Polish and Italian police identify camp guards who attempted to blend in to the group of 113 laborers, and 25 individuals were arrested, including those detained in Poland. According to Maslowski, the bulk of those detained are Poles. (One Italian, two Ukrainians, and one Algerian were arrested.) The Poles will all be prosecuted here in Poland for trafficking in persons, membership in a criminal group, and enslavement. Maslowski said his team is also trying to gather evidence from the oral testimonies of the victims for murder charges against the group's most brutal criminals.

¶8. COMMENT: Over the past year, we have heard many of our NGO

and Police contacts tell us that trafficking for forced labor, as opposed to trafficking for sexual services, is a growing concern. The national coordinator of the GOP's interagency working group to combat trafficking told us in early July that training for law enforcement officials and regional labor inspectors to detect forced labor more effectively would be a priority this year. This case reinforces the need for such training and public awareness. It also highlights the PNP's ability to work effectively to protect Polish citizens throughout Europe with large-scale takedowns of sophisticated criminal organizations (Reftel). However, we remain interested in what further investigations will reveal about the role of powerful Italian landowners and corrupt Italian officials, and hopeful that the recent GOI decision to open their labor market to the new EU 10 workers will curb further enslavement of desperate Poles hoping to earn a living in their "promised land." End comment.

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